

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L DUBLIN 1426

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TAGS: PINT, PFOR, EI, UK (N.I.)

SUBJECT: GOI OFFICIAL ON NORTHERN IRELAND

1. BEGAN SUMMARY. CHARGE AND POLITICAL OFFICER HAD A DISCUSSION AUGUST 12 WITH GOI'S NORTHERNIRELAND EXPERT, FONOFF ASSISTANT SECRETARY SEAN DONLON. HE HAD JUST RETURNED FROM CONSULTATIONS IN BELFAST WHICH TOOK PLACE DURING LAST WEEKEND'S VIOLENCE. HIS GENERAL OUTLOOK ON THE SITUATION WAS UNBELIEVEDLY PESSIMISTIC, AND HE SAW LITTLE CHANCE OF ANY POLITICAL SOLUTION COMING OUT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. END SUMMARY

2. IN THE SHORT RUN DONLON EXPECTS THAT THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION,

WHICH RECONVENES AUGUST 19, WILL FAIL TO REACH A SOLUTION. DESPITE OPTIMISTIC NOISES IN THE IRISH PRESS, THE INTERPARTY TALKS WHICH CONCLUDED LAST WEEK DECIDED NOTHING EXCEPT THAT FURTHER TALKS WILL BE HELD. THE PLANNED SCENARIO IS FOR THE CONVENTION TO ADJOURN AFTER TWO OR THREE DAYS IN ORDER TO ALLOW TIME, PROBABLY ABOUT TWO WEEKS, FOR THE PRIVATE INTER-PARTY TALKS TO CONTINUE. THEN THE CONVENTION WILL RECONVENE IN EARLY OR MID-SEPTEMBER. BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER, ACCORDING TO DONLON'S ADMITTEDLY PESSIMISTIC SCENARIO, IT WILL BE CLEAR THAT NEITHER SIDE CAN GIVE ENOUGH FOR ANY KIND OF COMPROMISE. "THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE POLITICIANS IN THE TWO CAMPS ARE PRISONERS:

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OF HISTORY, OF THEIR CONSTITUENTS, OF EXTREMISTS, AND INCREASINGLY

OF THE PARAMILITARY FORCES. THEY CANNOT APPEAR TO GIVE AWAY ANYTHING,

OR THEY WILL LOSE THEIR POSITION . . . ESPECIALLY THE LOYALISTS, WHO REMEMBER WHAT HAPPENED TO CHICHESTER-CLARK, O'NEILL, AND FAULKNER . . ." BY OCTOBER DONLON EXPECTS THE CONVENTION TO MAKE ITS REPORT TO HMG, ESSENTIALLY A FAILURE REPORT, WHICH WILL THEN PUT NORTHERN IRELAND INTO A "POLITICAL VACUUM."

3. DONLON THINKS THE SIGNS POINT TOWARD THE PROVISIONALS STARTING A "MAJOR CAMPAIGN" AROUND THE END OF SEPTEMBER, WHETHER THE CONVENTION SUCCEEDS OR FAILS. HE INTERPRETS LAST WEEKEND'S VIOLENCE AS QUITE POSSIBLY THE BEGINNING OF AN ATTEMPT BY THE PROVISIONALS TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR JUSTIFYING ANOTHER CAMPAIGN. THE PROVISIONALS SEEM TO BE IN A STRONG POSITION, HE SAID, AND APPEAR TO HAVE SOMEHOW REGAINED A GOOD BIT OF THE SUPPORT FROM THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY THAT HAD ERODED A YEAR AGO. THERE ARE VARIOUS REASONS FOR THIS -- SHORT MEMORIES, LOYALIST THREATS, AND CLEVER MANEUVERING BY THE PROVOS. ONE INTERESTING OBSERVATION BY DONLON, UNREPORTED IN THE MEDIA SO FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, IS THAT DURING THE CEASE-FIRE THE PROVOS HAVE BEEN VERY ACTIVE NOT ONLY IN THE NORTH BUT IN ALL 26 COUNTIES IN THE REPUBLIC, MOUNTING DANCES, SOCIAL AFFAIRS, COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES. DONLON SHRUGGED THAT SUCH EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE RESPECTABILITY THROUGH LOCAL COMMUNITY BASE-BUILDING COULD MEAN NOTHING MORE THAN "KEEPING THE LADS BUSY" DURING A PERIOD OF RELATIVE INACTIVITY. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT IDENTIFIABLE PROVO-SYMPATHIZERS ARE NOW ACTIVE IN GEOGRAPHIC AREAS WHERE THEY HAVE NEVER BEFORE BEEN SEEN. ON THE SUPPLY SIDE, THE PROVOS AND ALL THE OTHER PARAMILITARY GROUPS HAVE ABUNDANT STOCKS OF WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION. VIRTUALLY ALL THE PROVOS NOW HAVE MODERN AUTOMATIC WEAPONS.

4. LAST WEEKEND'S EVENTS WERE UNDERRATED AND UNDERREPORTED BY THE MEDIA IN IRELAND AND THE UK, DONLON ASSERTED. IT WAS, IN FACT, THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF VIOLENCE SINCE EARLY 1972. THE PRESS CONCENTRATED ON THE CATHOLIC RIOTING THROUGHOUT THE PROVINCE (ANNIVERSARY OF THE BEGINNING OF INTERNMENT), BUT COVERED ONLY LIGHTLY A MORE SIGNIFICANT MAJOR GUNBATTLE IN BELFAST, WHICH HE WITNESSED. IT BEGAN AS A FRACAS BETWEEN CATHOLIC (PROVO) AND PROTESTANT PARAMILITARY, BUT WHEN THE BRITISH ARMY INTERVENED IN FORCE BOTH SIDES STARTED SHOOTING AT THE ARMY, AND THERE WAS VERY HEAVY SHOOTING FOR A TIME. HE

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THOUGHT IT WAS A MIRACLE THAT ONLY THREE INNOCENT BYSTANDERS WERE KILLED. ACCORDING TO DONLON, THE HEAVY SHOOTING WAS INITIATED BY THE PROVOS, WHO WERE TRYING TO PROVE A POINT. IN A STATEMENT THE PROVOS CLAIMED THAT THE CATHOLIC AREAS WERE BEING ATTACKED BY PROTESTANTS, RUC AND THE ARMY AND THEY WERE MERELY CARRYING OUT THEIR DUTY TO DEFEND AGAINST UNPROVOKED ATTACK ON CATHOLICS.

5. DONLON WAS MILDLY CRITICAL OF BRITISH POLICY TOWARD THE PROVOS

DURING THE CEASE-FIRE PERIOD AS A RATHER "SOFT, HANDS-OFF POLICY." IT WAS A CALCULATED GAMBLE THAT THE PROVOS MIGHT SETTLE DOWN INTO PEACEFUL POLITICAL PURSUITS, BUT IT DIDN'T WORK. IT HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE PRESENT PROVO STRENGTH. IN COMPARISON, THE REPUBLIC'S POLICY HAS NEVER BEEN TOUGHER, AS EVIDENCED BY THE ARREST OF DAVID O'CONNELL.

6. IN REGARD TO PROVO SUPPORT IN THE US AND THE GENERAL FUND-RAISING SITUATION, DONLON COMMENTED THAT THE PROVOS NOW HAVE A MOST EFFICIENT ORGANIZATION WITH EXCELLENT COMMUNICATIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THEY HAVE ESTABLISHED A TELEX LINK BETWEEN BELFAST AND NEW YORK/BOSTON/PHILADELPHIA, WHICH MEANS THEY CAN GET THEIR VERSION OF EVENTS PUBLICIZED IN AMERICA BEFORE THE GOI CAN GET THE WORD TO ITS OWN MISSIONS. IN AN ASIDE, HE SAID THAT FOREIGN MINISTER FITZGERALD WILL ONCE AGAIN TRY TO DAMPEN THIS SUPPORT IN THE US WHEN HE VISITS NEW YORK FOR THE UNGA.

7. COMMENT: THOUGH ONE OF IRELAND'S MOST BRILLIANT YOUNG DIPLOMATS, DONLON CAN GET RATHER EMOTIONAL ON THIS SUBJECT AND HE HIMSELF NOTED THAT THE HEAVY VIOLENCE HE HAD JUST PERSONALLY WITNESSED PROBABLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE GLOOMY PICTURE WHICH HE GOT FROM OTHERS AND PAINTED FOR US. THE IRISH TIMES SEES SOME SPARKS OF HOPE IN THE JUST-CONCLUDED INTERPARTY TALKS, AND MANY OBSERVERS HERE HAVE REFUSED TO WRITE OFF THE CONVENTION. HOWEVER, THERE IS CONSIDERABLE UNEASE HERE ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GREATLY INCREASED VIOLENCE. RENDAHL

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